

Christians as God's Temple

Leela opened her lavender King James Version Bible to Ruth. It was the book the women were studying at her new church. Leela enjoyed displaying her beautiful, worn Bible. She had dozens and dozens of Scriptures highlighted in various colors.

She had suggested to Sister Elyse to encourage the women to bring a printed Bible, "because it makes for better studying." Leela also offered to be leader of any future Bible studies. She could think of several topics to cover and ways to engage the other women.

Leela had been in church for much of her fifty-two years of life. She would be a helpful addition to the church, she had told the pastor's wife.

She took a lap around the large rectangle table, repositioning the study books and pens. She was headed back to her seat when she saw two women come into the room. She couldn't remember their names. They each hugged Leela and sat on opposite sides of her.

"Is this your Bible?" asked one of them. "It's beautiful."

"And look at all the highlights," said the other. "You must read your Bible a lot."

"I came to Christ recently, and I've been reading through the Bible for the first time," chimed the first.

"Which passages have impacted you the most?"

Leela responded with a blank stare.

1. *What are some motivations people might have for wanting to appear wise to others?*

2. *What does "being wise" mean to you?*

3. *When have you wanted to appear wise in the eyes of others, and how might you approach it differently in light of the call to "become foolish"?*

Building Faithfully

1 Corinthians 3:10–15 KJV

10 According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. 11 For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; 13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. 14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. 15 If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

1 Corinthians 3:10–15 NIV

¹⁰ By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴ If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Paul calls the letter's recipients "God's building" in verse 9. Paul portrays himself and the gifted speaker Apollos (see 1 Cor. 3:4–6; Acts 18:24–26) as laborers on this building. Paul rejects the view that he and Apollos are rivals. Instead, he describes their relationship as cooperative laborers working together toward a common goal. Paul's role is that of the wise master builder, the person who manages a group of workers on a building project. In Acts, Paul had founded the church at Corinth (Acts 18:1–11, 18), and

Apollos came later to continue the work sometime after Paul left.

Paul warns that believers must be careful how they build on this foundation. Paul and the other apostles' duties are not to be taken lightly, and the quality of their work will be tested. They do not have the luxury of petty rivalries or self-glory. At the same time, this exhortation also addresses the leaders of the Corinthian community. God will hold them responsible for how they build His church, because Jesus Christ is its unique foundation (v. 11).

In verse 12, Paul compares the way one builds to constructing with different materials. Some would use valuable materials that last through time and reflect the importance of the building. Others use wood, hay, and stubble, which are neither precious nor long-lasting. The nature of one's work will ultimately come to light, because the day shall declare it (v. 13). Paul here likely refers to the Day of the Lord, the time when Christ returns, judges the living and the dead, and establishes justice in the world (2 Cor. 1:14; 1 Thess. 5:1–4; 2 Thess. 2:2–3; 2 Tim. 4:8). The Scriptures sometimes associate this day with purging fire (2 Pet. 2:10, 13), and Paul probably draws on that same imagery here. The fires of God's judgment show the character of a leader's work. Leaders who build well will see their work survive the flames and receive a reward (v. 14). Others will find that their labor burns away; but while they will not receive a reward, God still brings them His promised salvation (Rom. 10:13). Paul thus emphasizes God's grace even toward those who fail in the work that God has given them.

4. *Why must church leaders build carefully upon the foundation Paul laid?*

5. *Why might this passage be relevant to those who aren't involved in explicitly Christian ministry?*

God's Temple

16 Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? 17 If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

18 Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. 21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; 22 Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; 23 And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any of you think you are wise by the standards of this age, you should become "fools" so that you may become wise.

¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.

As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness";

²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." ²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

Here Paul identifies the type of building in view, calling the Corinthian community the temple of God (v. 16). Greeks, Romans, and Jews alike thought of temples as places where a deity's presence could reside.

Paul can describe the Corinthian community this way because, "the Spirit of God dwelleth in you" (v. 16 KJV). The Greek pronoun translated "you" in this verse is plural, referring to the entire church. Paul's focus here is on the Spirit's role within the community, which functions collectively as God's temple.

In verse 17, Paul issues a warning based on the temple metaphor. Since the community is God's holy temple, God will destroy those who defile the community. Paul frames his warning with a play on words, as the verbs for "destroy" and "defile" (KJV) are the same Greek verb. The wordplay emphasizes the balance of God's justice: the one who destroys God's temple will be destroyed. Paul is again warning that the community's leaders should protect—not harm—the community.

Verses 18–23 weave together the major threads of Paul's response to the divisions in Corinth. The ironic contrast between the wise person and the fool returns to a theme that came up earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:18–31, where Paul argues that the divine wisdom of the gospel transcends the philosophy and values of the Greek and Roman world. Paul goes further here, saying that the world's "wisdom" is actually foolishness with God.

To support his claim, Paul quotes Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. Job 5 is a speech of Eliphaz (one of Job's friends), who highlights God's concern for the lowly, impoverished, and weak, rather than those the world considers rich, powerful, and wise. In Psalm 94, the speaker asks how long the wicked will prosper in their schemes (vv. 3–7); but the psalmist affirms God's attention and coming judgment against them (vv. 8–23).

Although the Corinthian Christ-followers thought they served the apostles, it would be more accurate to say that the apostles serve them, as do the world and its spiritual forces (v. 22; compare Rom. 8:38–39). The Corinthians themselves are also servants of Christ (v. 23).

6. *Why does Paul call the Corinthian church the temple of God?*

7. *What does Paul say will happen to those who defile God's temple?*

8. *Why does Paul say the Corinthians should not pursue the glory of humans?*

God's Home, With Us

In the course of my life, I've lived in ten different houses and three different states. I've transitioned from my role as a child in my parents' home, to a single adult with roommates, to a married mother of four. With each new phase, I had to reimagine what it meant to be "at home."

One thing remains clear: a home is more than the four walls that contain it. A house might be made of drywall and ceiling tiles, of dirt and wood, of marble and gold—but a home is the life lived inside. Even with all the shifting containers, some things remained, no matter where I settled. The rhythms we practice, the meals we decide to cook, the activities we engage in—these are what determine the culture of a home.

For centuries, the Israelites connected God's "home" to the temple. The walls of the temple, the materials that fashioned it, the symbolism etched into every object—all of these helped form their ideas of what it means to be at home with God. But now, God was on the move! Imagine what a transition that would have meant for them. Paul wants his readers to understand that God is bigger than the walls of the temple. His Spirit is not the building; it is the life inside. And now, that Spirit is moving beyond the walls of the temple and into every follower of Jesus.

If God's Spirit is not bound to a building, then the universal church isn't, either. It is the life lived among believers that constitutes God's true home. When we come together, God's presence can be shared among us. That is why Paul says, "you together" are the temple. It's why unity is so important.

10. *What do you think makes a house a home?*

11. *Why do you think God chose to make His home among followers of Christ, rather than a building?*

12. *How might being filled with the Holy Spirit make God's presence known "on earth as it is in heaven"?*

The Responsibility of Leaders

Again and again in today's text, Paul calls attention to the unique call for leaders of God's people. Because God's people are a temple, together, those charged with building this community will be held to a high standard. If you have a leadership position in your church community, answer the first prompt. If you do not, you can respond to the second prompt to pray for your leaders.

► *As a leader in my church, I know that the foundation of my success is Christ. I commit myself to pursuing the wisdom of God rather than the esteem of others. That might mean . . .*

► *As a member of the community that is the temple of God's presence, I commit myself to praying for my leaders. I pray that God gives _____ the wisdom required to lead without worrying what people might say.*

KEY VERSE

For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11 KJV

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. —1 Corinthians 3:11 NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of August 4 through August 10

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* for devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Genesis 2:4–7, 18–25—God Creates Man and Woman.

Tues. Psalm 90:1–12—Life Is Short; Live Wisely.

Wed. 1 Corinthians 10:23–33—Live Gloriously.

Thurs. 1 Timothy 4:1–5—Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving.

Fri. Psalm 139:1–12—No Hiding Place from God.

Sat. Psalm 139:13–24—Fearfully and Wonderfully Made.

Sun. 1 Corinthians 6:12–20—A Temple of the Holy Spirit.